

Exhibits at the Williams Museum

By Daniel Grant

SELECTIONS FROM the Collection of Bennington College," at the Williams College Museum of Art through Dec. 8, brings to one impressive college art museum some of the works from another admirable institution.

Judging by the 25 or so works on view, Bennington College has collected intelligently and courageously over the years.

With two notable exceptions, all of the works that were brought from Bennington are postwar modernism, consisting mostly of paintings, most of them abstract. Among the artists included are Josef Albers, Anthony Caro, Paul Feeley, Agnes Martin, Diego Rivera and Tony Smith.

Enormous canvases by Jules Olitski, Kenneth Noland and Helen Frankenthaler dominate the galleries. Each consists of sizeable areas of color that blend with each other either to form subtle variations (Olitski and Noland) or clash (Frankenthaler). A somewhat smaller untitled painting by Larry Poons looks like a rainstorm of colors that splash and merge at the picture's bottom.

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Breaking from the self-absorbed concerns of color, surface and texture is a more figurative tempera by Romare Bearden entitled "Maturation" in which a solemn occasion, perhaps a funeral, is described in mask-like forms.

A number of works on display are not in the characteristic style for which the artists are best known. The Frankenthaler, for example, is more gestural than visitors may be used to. Sculptor David Smith is represented by two pen-and-ink drawings that look like letters or musical notations that somehow burst into pieces and float freely about the page. A Robert Motherwell collage, "Sea Lion with Red Stripe" has a far more jolly feel than his black-and-white paintings.

Many of these artists taught at Bennington College at one time or another, which reflects well on the school for its commitment to both high quality art and instruction. As two formalist art critics and one-time Bennington faculty members, Eugene C. Goosen and Clement Greenberg strongly touted many of these same artists, and this exhibit reflects the Greenbergian vision of modernism — flat and concerned with its own materiality. One wishes that more attention might have been paid to the influence of these critics on the acquisitions policies of Bennington College.

Williams collection

What Williams College Museum of Art itself collects is on view in a three-gallery show, **Highlights of American Art: Selections from the Permanent Collection**, which continues through June 28 of next year.

A wide range of important artists is included, dating back to the mid-18th century and continuing up to 1945. On display are works by Milton Avery, George Bellows, Mary Cassatt, Edward Hopper, John LaFarge, Georgia O'Keeffe, Gilbert Stuart, Benjamin West and Grant Wood.

Among the most striking works is a 1944 urban scene by Edward Hopper, "Morning in a City," in which a naked woman stands in front of an open window next to her bed. She looks out the window sorrowfully, unafraid of being seen because, one assumes, no one pays any attention to you in cities. That certainly was Hopper's conception of cities.

A 1935 Grant Wood painting, "Death on the Ridge Road," is an oddity as it surveys an automobile accident that is about to happen. Knowing from the picture's title what will happen to these two cars and one truck makes one feel like God.

Milton Avery's "Girl in a Wicker Chair" (1944) and Hans Hofmann's 1936 "Still Life" find the two painters in a quite Matisse-like mood, with solid areas of color leaping forward as though defying customary notions of gravity and spatial